

Lake County News Sun, October 23, 2007

In an effort to eradicate a bottleneck that has been the bane of local commuters for years, an \$18.5 million project to widen the Route 60 bridge over the Tri-State Tollway begins next month.

"This is the worst traffic tie-up in Lake County," said U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, who secured \$9 million in federal funding for the project. "I've always said if you get stuck here after 3:30 p.m., you might as well get a hotel room."

Kirk, who said more than 36,000 vehicles pass through the area every day, joined transportation officials and business leaders Monday morning in the CDW parking lot near the bridge to announce the specific timeline for the work.

Once completed, the bridge, which currently has two lanes in each direction, will have three lanes in each direction along with dual left-turn lanes.

Ann Berube, an Illinois Department of Transportation construction supervisor, said pre-construction work will begin in mid-November, with the heart of the project getting under way in December, when workers will begin building the north half of the new bridge.

"That will be the most painful part, with traffic on the bridge down to one lane in each direction," she said.

May 15 is the target date for work to begin on the southern half of the bridge, at which time two lanes of traffic will be open in each direction. Major construction is scheduled to be completed by Dec. 1 next year.

While the project -- being done in conjunction with the North Tri-State Rebuild and Widening Project -- is expected to bring major rush-hour relief to the area, the construction lane closures are sure to present a challenge for those who work nearby.

Business leaders in Lake Forest and Mettawa, who contributed \$1 million toward the project, are concerned enough to have established a Web site for their workers to help prepare for the project.

It also appears that the state budget crisis may eliminate the shuttle bus program -- now busing thousands of workers to businesses in the corridor -- at the worst possible time.

Phil Lippert, a representative of W.W. Grainger Inc. who also serves as president of the Transportation Management Association of Lake-Cook, said flex time and car-pooling will be among the ways of dealing with the construction.

"We've always had flex scheduling for employees. It's the one thing we could do," Lippert said. "It is going to be difficult. Our employees come from all over."

The bridge will be down to one lane each way, so that's bad," said Martin Buehler, director of the Lake County Division of Transportation. "But the tollway's going to keep three lanes open each way, so north-south should be OK. People are going to have to monitor their commuting time and explore other routes.

But Buehler said that once completed, the new structure will, in effect, be a 10-lane bridge with the regular lanes and turn lanes.

"It's going to be huge," he said. "Big bridge."